

The Effect of Internal Marketing on Work Engagement of Academic Staff in Higher Educational Institutions

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ABSTRACT Due to their important roles in organizational success, internal marketing and work engagement have become more interesting subjects among researchers. However, empirical research is limited in the literature, and the relationship between these two variables in higher education institutions is not clear. Hence, the purpose of this study was to examine the effect of internal marketing on work engagement of academic staff in higher educational institutions. The data for the study was collected from academic staff who worked in the school of sport sciences in Turkey. The findings showed a statistically significant positive effect of internal marketing on work engagement. As a result, this study revealed that internal marketing is an effective tool for work engagement of academic staff.

INTRODUCTION

As an external factor, competition forces organizations to become more efficient and produce better quality products than its competitors. As an internal environment resource, on the other hand, employees of an organization have prime responsibility to produce the better quality products demanded to meet customers' needs. When the company's offerings are intangible products (services), product differentiation is usually closely related to the employee performance because of the nature of these services that require contact with customers (Ocal and Kocak 2015). Therefore, service organizations' employees are considered a critical resource in accomplishing sustainable competitive advantage in an uncontrollable competitive environment.

Satisfaction of external customers is crucial for organization survival, reputation, and in achieving customer loyalty. If the employees play such a crucial role in satisfying external customers and achieving organizational goals, Berry (1981) argued that only satisfied employees would be able to satisfy the external customers' demanding requirements. Hence, employees may be viewed as internal customers and internal marketing activities need to be performed to satisfy their needs. Berry defined internal market-

ing as "viewing employees as internal customers, viewing jobs as internal products that satisfy the needs and wants of these internal customers while addressing the objectives of the organization" (p. 34). Accordingly, internal marketing treats employees in organizations as internal market and directs resources to satisfy these internal customers' needs so that they can satisfy the needs of external customers (Rafiq and Ahmed 1993). To satisfy the needs of internal customers, internal marketing suggest the application of traditional marketing tools and strategies to organization's employees (Lings 2004). Similar to focusing on satisfying the needs of external customers, internal marketing concentrates on satisfying the needs if employees. Marketing literature provides various studies that have examined the process of marketing activities that are directed to satisfy the needs of internal customers (Foreman and Money 1995; Galpin 1997; Gounaris 2006; Ferdous and Polonsky 2014). Yildiz and Kara's (2015) study provides a scale that measures internal marketing orientation by mainly focusing on employee expectations on physical conditions, fundamental needs, direction, workload and support, vision, training/development, career advancement opportunities, equal and fair treatment, open and transparent communication, participating in decision making process, and providing rewards.

Work engagement is another concept which has recently gained importance in service organizations. Work engagement can be defined as "...a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication,

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and absorption (Schaufeli et al. 2002). Originating from the role theory, work engagement concept emphasizes that employees demonstrate their psychological presence by dedicating their physical, cognitive, and affective energies to work role (Kahn 1992).

While Maslach and Leiter (1997) evaluate work engagement as the opposite of occupational burnout, Schaufeli et al. (2002), argued that it needs to be assessed independently from the burnout. Accordingly, work engagement consists of three sub-dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. *Vigor* is defined as being strong in terms of energy and mental resilience as well as making an effort to struggle against difficulties; *dedication* is defined as latching onto work with focus, enthusiasm, and pride; *absorption*, on the other hand, expresses performing the work happily by focusing completely and with pleasure. Engagement is a non-physical power which directs the employee to high performance by providing high concentration. Engaged employees lose themselves in their work by concentrating on it and use virtually all their resources for performing the work (Bakker and Demerouti 2008).

According to research, properties such as work satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and intention to stay at work are observed in engaged employees (Saks 2006). Empirical evidence supports the effects of these properties to the success and efficiency of organizations (Altarifi 2014). Therefore, work engagement is a critical and current issue to further be examined by research to uncover its relationship with other important organizational issues, such as internal marketing. Internal marketing is considered as a fundamental tool for motivating employees to get more engaged with the work they are performing (Czaplewski et al. 2001). However, literature provides limited empirical research results examining the relationships between internal marketing and work engagement (Shahzad and Naeem 2013). In fact, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no studies have examined the effect of internal marketing on work engagement of academic staff yet. Therefore, this study was aimed at examining the effect of internal marketing on work engagement related to academic staff working in the school of sport sciences in higher educational institutions.

Research Hypotheses

For organizational success, establishing relationships with both internal (employees) and external (customers) is an important factor, and therefore organizations need to focus on internal exchanges among their employees (George 1990). The internal relations in organizations are considered a win-win paradigm. According to this paradigm, the establishments and employees consider each other and contribute mutually. Establishing internal relationships with employees lead to satisfied employees with higher performance levels and in return, organization benefits better customer satisfaction and high levels of productivity (efficiency) (Yildiz 2014). Varey (1995) emphasizes that mutually beneficial relationships may be accomplished through open and two way communication. Although we can find few empirical studies in the literature that have investigated the internal marketing and work engagement concepts separately, studies investigating their interactions are limited and hence justified. Accordingly, the following hypotheses were developed with respect to the relationships between internal marketing and work engagement. In general, it is hypothesized that internal marketing will strengthen the work engagement levels of employees but more specifically:

- H₁. Internal marketing will have a positive effect on vigor.
- H₂. Internal marketing will have a positive effect on dedication.
- H₃. Internal marketing will have a positive effect on absorption.
- H₄. Internal marketing will have a positive effect on work engagement.

METHODOLOGY

Research Model

As mentioned earlier, the objective of this study was to examine the role of internal marketing on work engagement levels of academic staff in the school of sport sciences. The conceptual model of this study that shows the hypothesized relationships are illustrated in Figure 1. The conceptual model shows internal marketing as an independent variable and work engagement and its sub-dimensions such as vigor, dedication, and absorption as dependent variables.

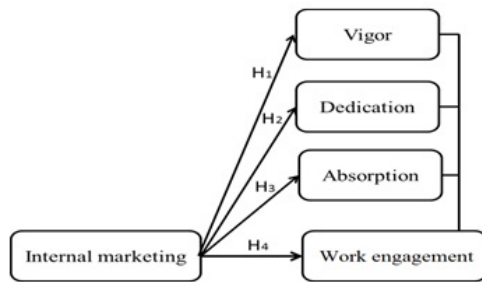


Fig. 1. The effect of internal marketing on work engagement

Measurement Instruments

Internal Marketing

In this study, the researchers used an 11-item IM-11 scale developed by Yildiz and Kara (2015) to operationalize the internal marketing construct. Developed questionnaire measured internal marketing questions using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree.” Some of the questions included on the questionnaire asked participants to respond to statements such as “This organization strengthens its employees” and “This organization provides rewards to high-performing employees.” High-scale values indicated high perceptions of internal marketing.

Work Engagement

A 9-item UWES-9 scale with the sub-dimensions of “vigor,” “dedication,” and “absorption” was used to measure work engagement (Schaufeli et al. 2006). This scale included various questions such as “At my work, I am bursting with energy” and “My job inspires me.” The statements were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (“never”) to 7 (“always”). High values indicated higher levels of work engagement.

The scales in the questionnaire were translated into Turkish by the researcher and cross-checked by field experts. After the necessary adjustments were made, the developed questionnaire was administered to the study participants.

Sample Size and Procedure

The data used in this study were collected from academic staff working in the school of

sport sciences at 10 state universities located in Turkey. The communication was provided via electronic communication tools. First, the purpose and content of the study were explained and invitation messages were sent to 328 academic staff to voluntarily participate in the study. After receiving a confirmation message of their willingness to participate in the study, the study questionnaire was sent to 198 academic staff who had positively responded to the researchers’ inquiries and they were given a week to fill out the forms. After a week, the researchers obtained 160 completed questionnaires. After a careful inspection, 11 questionnaires had several missing responses and were deemed to be unusable and hence were discarded. Therefore, total of 149 questionnaires were used in the statistical analysis to test the hypothesized relationships.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

Majority of the sample were males (70.5%) and married (64.4%). Most people had PhD degrees (63.1%) and were between 26 and 45 years old. Approximately one-third (31%) of the subjects had administrative duties and their academic rank was distributed as follows: lecturer (11.4%), research assistant (28.9%), instructor (18.8%), assistant professor (22.1%), associate professor (18.1%), and professor (0.7%). The level of income for most of the participants was between \$1,251 and \$1,785 per month and half of the participants had less than 5 years of employment while the other half have been working for the same academic institution for more than 5 years (Table 1).

Test for Validity and Reliability

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to confirm the dimensionality of the sales used in the study. IM-11 scale is assumed to have a unidimensional structure and the work engagement construct is measured in three dimensions. CFA results showed strong model fit indices for both scales (IM-11 scale; RMR=0.041; GFI=0.953; AGFI=0.929; NFI=0.950; CFI=1.000; RMSEA=0.00 and the work engagement scale; RMR=0.017; GFI=0.972; AGFI=0.948; NFI=0.977; CFI=1.000; RMSEA=0.00). These model fit val-

Table 1: Sample characteristics

<i>Variables Categories</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	105	70.5
Female	44	29.5
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Married	96	64.4
Single	53	35.6
<i>Age</i>		
Less than 25	4	2.7
26-35	52	34.9
36-45	58	38.9
46-55	17	11.4
More than 56	18	12.1
<i>Degree</i>		
Undergraduate	10	6.7
Master	45	30.2
Doctoral	94	63.1
<i>Title</i>		
Lecturer	17	11.4
Research Assistant	43	28.9
Instructor	28	18.8
Assistant Professor	33	22.1
Associate Professor	27	18.1
Professor	1	0.7
<i>Administrative Duties</i>		
No	103	69.1
Yes	46	30.9
<i>Income</i>		
Less than 1250 USD	33	22.1
1251-1428 USD	62	41.6
1429-1607 USD	29	19.5
1608-1785 USD	23	15.4
More than 1786 USD	2	1.3
<i>Length of Employment in Current Institution</i>		
Less than 5 years	74	49.7
6 to 10 years	21	14.1
11 to 15 years	19	12.8
16 to 20 years	17	11.4
21 to 25 years	9	6.0
More than 26 years	9	6.0
<i>Total Length of Working Life</i>		
Less than 5 years	37	24.8
6 to 10 years	19	12.8
11 to 15 years	25	16.8
16 to 20 years	19	12.8
21 to 25 years	26	17.4
More than 26 years	23	15.4

ues meet the criteria suggested in the literature (Browne and Cudeck 1993; Byrne 2001). Reliability analysis using Cronbach alpha coefficient of the IM-11 scale indicated a high reliability score of 0.904, and 0.910 for the work engagement scale. These values indicate that all scales are highly reliable.

Correlation Analyses

Literature provides information regarding the low, moderate, and high levels of correlation lev-

els among constructs. If the correlation is between 0.1 and 0.3, it is considered a low correlation, 0.3-0.5 moderate correlation, and 0.5-0.7 high correlation (Cohen 1988). As a result of correlation analysis in this study, it was determined that a significant, positive, and high-level relationship was found between internal marketing and work engagement ($r=0.564$; $p<0.01$). This result indicated that, as internal marketing increases, the employees will be engaged in work. Moreover, while absorption, a sub-dimension of work engagement, was related with internal marketing at medium level ($r=0.412$; $p<0.01$), vigor ($r=0.582$; $p<0.01$) and dedication ($r=0.507$; $p<0.01$) were related at high levels (Table 2).

Hierarchical Regression Analysis

The results of the two-stage hierarchical regression analysis are given in Table 3 where work engagement and its sub-dimensions were used as dependent variables one at a time and internal marketing was considered as independent variable. Regression results show that work engagement was positively and significantly affected by internal marketing ($\beta=0.610$; $p<0.01$). Similarly, the dimensions of vigor ($\beta=0.624$; $p<0.01$), dedication ($\beta=0.552$; $p<0.01$) and absorption ($\beta=0.451$; $p<0.01$) were also positively and significantly affected by internal marketing. Significance was just determined in gender among control variables. Gender only affected dedication which is one of the sub-dimensions of work engagement ($\beta=-0.161$; $p<0.05$). Consequently, hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4 are all confirmed according to the data.

DISCUSSION

Literature provides limited research evidence on the relationship between internal marketing and work engagement. Hence, this study was conducted to investigate the relationship between the two constructs. As service institutions, universities play important part many people's lives and the quality of the service delivered is significantly influenced by the academic staff. Therefore, the researchers selected the school of sport sciences academic staff as subjects and the university as organizational setting to test the hypothesized relationships. The researchers hope that this study will fill the gap

Table 2: Results of correlation analysis

<i>Variables</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	
1. Gender							
2. Marital status	.041						
3. Age	-.056	-.362**					
4. Degree	-.091	-.134	-.085				
5. Title	-.087	-.272**	.300**	.525**			
6. Administrative duties	-.082	-.254**	.016	.190*	.341**		
7. Income	-.074	-.275**	.276**	.307**	.515**	.357**	
8. Length of employment in current institution	.071	-.309**	.706**	-.273**	.078	-.101	
9. Total length of working life	-.024	-.450**	.848**	-.015	.392**	.125	
10. Internal marketing	-.157	-.068	.076	.032	.147	.230**	
11. Vigor	-.161*	.037	.059	-.046	-.042	.027	
12. Dedication	-.225**	.105	-.033	.005	-.047	-.053	
13. Absorption	-.117	-.052	.031	.106	.006	-.056	
14. Work engagement	-.188*	.038	.023	.015	-.033	-.025	
<i>Variables</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>13</i>
1. Gender							
2. Marital status							
3. Age							
4. Degree							
5. Title							
6. Administrative duties							
7. Income							
8. Length of employment in current institution	.052						
9. Total length of working life	.411**	.680**					
10. Internal marketing	.186*	.008	.168*				
11. Vigor	-.027	.086	.042	.582**			
12. Dedication	-.080	-.027	-.041	.507**	.835**		
13. Absorption	.012	.070	.073	.412**	.643**	.659**	
14. Work engagement	-.036	.049	.026	.564**	.936**	.929**	.830**

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Table 3: The Results of the hierarchical regression analysis aiming to identify the relationship between work engagement and independent variables

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Vigor</i>		<i>Dedication</i>		<i>Absorption</i>		<i>Work engagement</i>	
	<i>Step 1</i>	<i>Step 2</i>	<i>Step 1</i>	<i>Step 2</i>	<i>Step 1</i>	<i>Step 2</i>	<i>Step 1</i>	<i>Step 2</i>
1. Gender	-.174*	-.086	-.239**	-.161*	-.130	-.066	-.202*	-.116
2. Marital status	.088	.051	.110	.077	-.014	-.041	.073	.037
3. Age	.006	.113	-.066	.029	-.173	-.096	-.076	.029
4. Degree	.018	.059	.045	.081	.187	.217*	.083	.122
5. Title	-.074	-.091	-.030	-.045	-.106	-.118	-.076	-.092
6. Administrative duties	.077	-.030	-.023	-.118	-.073	-.151	.002	-.103
7. Income	-.024	-.055	-.076	-.104	-.013	-.035	-.042	-.072
8. Length of employment in current institution	.133	.180	.028	.070	.124	.158	.106	.153
9. Total length of working life	.013	-.197	.087	-.099	.185	.033	.095	-.110
10. Internal marketing	-	.624**	-	.552**	-	.451**	-	.610**
<i>F</i>	.789	8.985	1.204	7.190	.913	4.281	.848	8.565
<i>R</i> ²	.049	.394	.072	.343	.056	.237	.052	.383
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	-.013	.350	.012	.295	-.005	.181	-.009	.338

Note: Standardized beta values were used, ***p* < 0.01; **p* < 0.05

in the literature by providing empirical evidence on how internal marketing influences on work

engagement of academic staff in the school of sport sciences in higher educational institutions.

The findings of this study indicated that internal marketing is an important determinant on work engagement. Internal marketing has a significant positive effect on work engagement (Table 3). In other words, internal marketing improves work engagement of academic staff. This result support the similar results reported by Albassami et al. (2015) and Shahzad and Naeem (2013) in the banking sector, where the interaction between the service provider and customer is usually on an individual basis differing from the university setting where one provider services a group of students simultaneously.

This study has also looked at the sub-dimensions of work engagement individually and examined the role of internal marketing on each one of them. Moreover, gender was also used as one of the control variables checking its influence on the relationships independently. Results showed that the male academic staff had higher levels of work engagement than female staff. It is important to note that more than 70 percent of the subjects were male and these results need to be interpreted carefully (Table 1). Furthermore, due to the traditional nature of the Turkish society, females usually assume more responsibilities at home therefore perhaps limiting their engagement levels at school (Aktas 2012). For this reason, when the desire of men to spend their time at work other than at their house was taken into consideration, the tendency of a man to put his mind to work can be evaluated as a consistent result.

As a consequence, it was indicated that effective internal marketing applications might encourage employees to work harder. In other words, within a win-win paradigm, it can be concluded that work-engaged employees (gain of organization) are obtained via internal marketing in organizations (gain of employee). Therefore, internal marketing should be adopted to achieve high levels of employee work engagement (Sanchez-Herandez and Grayson 2012). Universities can adopt internal marketing philosophy and strategies to improve the work engagement levels of their employees and hence contributing to the quality of the service delivered to their external customers. In order for organizations to have engaged employees, it is necessary to present attractive physical opportunities (office, equipment, facility, etc.), give a reasonable work load, give appropriate authorization, have a vision, present career advance-

ment opportunities, treat workers equally and fairly, as well as to form clear and pure communication channels. In addition to these, the main activities that should be done can be given as meeting the basic requirements of employees (salary, insurance, work safety, etc.), training employees for developing their information and talents, taking their ideas while deciding, and awarding their success. Thus, since engaged employees will make more of an effort to work, this will directly contribute to work performance (Breevaart et al. 2015; Rich et al. 2010; Tortosa-Edo et al. 2010). Therefore, high performance of employees will affect the satisfaction levels of customers more and will positively reflect on the efficiency of the organization (Luthans and Peterson 2002).

CONCLUSION

This study presents the results of an empirical study that was designed to examine the role of internal marketing on work engagement of academic staff in higher education institutions. The results show that internal marketing is related to work engagement. In other words, internal marketing will increase work engagement of academic staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A set of administrative applications in organizations directly affects employees and indirectly affects organizational success. Internal marketing applications are important tools which meet the expectations of academic staff in higher educational institutions and positively affect them. Effective internal marketing applications meet the needs of academic staff and contribute to their work engagement. Therefore, working performances of work engaged academic staff also increases.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was limited to school of sport sciences in higher educational institutions in Turkey and focused on academic staff working here. For this reason, the results of this study cannot be generalized to all academic staff in higher educational institutions due to the sample used. Therefore, other researchers should

apply similar data collection and analysis methods on other research groups and should test whether the results of this research are consistent with theirs. Moreover, it is necessary to test subjects in other countries and discuss the results in order to generalize various subjects in various cultural environments.

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